



Inside Ag *March 5, 2008*

EASTER EGGS



It's that time of year again when eggs seem to hop right off the store shelves to become the Easter Bunny's bounty!

Historically, eggs were regarded as symbols of the renewal of life. They were decorated to be given as gifts to celebrate springtime. At one time, eating eggs during Lent was forbidden by the church and they were considered treats to be enjoyed again at Easter.

If you plan to hard boil your eggs and decorate them, follow these tips:

- Store the eggs in the refrigerator for up to 10 days before cooking. This will make them easier to peel.
- Place eggs in a single layer in a saucepan and cover with at least one inch of water.
- Cover the pan and bring quickly just to boiling.
- Remove from the heat and let the eggs stand in the hot water for about 15 minutes.
- Then cool the eggs completely by running under cold water.
- To remove the shell, crack it by tapping gently all over.
- Roll the egg between your hands to loosen the shell.
- Peel from the large end of the egg.

Eggshells can be decorated using everything from beads to lace. If you want to dye the egg shells while hard boiling, you can make your own colors at home. Fresh foods can lend coloring to your creativity. Spinach leaves make green dye while orange peel will make yellow dye. Crushed blueberries will make blue, cranberries will make red, and beet juice will make a pink dye. Simply place eggs with the colorant in a saucepan. Add two tablespoons of vinegar and just enough water to cover the eggs. Bring it all to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes.

Since eggs are perishable, proper storage and handling are vital to ensure that egg quality is maintained. Egg producers and packers are required to label cartons with the size, grade, date the eggs were packaged and the producer's identification.



The Colorado Department of Agriculture conducts inspections at egg wholesaler and retail outlets, to verify that eggs are handled properly and accurately sized and graded. These inspections ensure that eggs purchased by consumers are wholesome and of the labeled quality/grade. During an egg inspection, shells are examined to ensure that they are clean and have no

prominent stains. The interior of the egg (yolk and white) is checked by a procedure called candling. Long ago, candling was done by holding the egg in front of a candle in a dark room. Now, special lights are used. The freshness of the egg can be determined by looking at the size of the air cell. Air cells are found inside an egg, typically at the larger end of the egg. Air cells increase in size over time, as the egg ages. Candling allows measurement of the air cell which equates to age and grade. The smaller the air cell the fresher the egg and higher the grade. Grade AA is the highest quality, followed by Grade A and Grade B. Defects such as blood spots and cracked shells, referred to as "checks," can also be found during candling.

Colorado's laying flocks produced just over 1 billion eggs in 2005, which is the 22nd highest in the United States. Currently, Colorado has about one layer per person.

For more interesting egg facts, or to learn how to make your own candler, please visit the [Egg Program](#) on the CDA website. Or, contact the Division of Inspection and Consumer Services Egg Program at 303-477-0093 for further information.